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AUTHOR Peper, John B.
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ABSTRACT

The speaker recommends the establishment of a national network of cooperating public schools and universities; the extension of degree and credential programs through a national compendium of established courses, a series of short courses, and the awarding of micro-credits; and establishment of professors-in-residence in public school central administration offices. The substantive blind side currently prevalent in education programs of practicing administrators is discussed with suggestions for a remedy. The paper concludes with recommendations concerning administrative team building. (Author/IRT)

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PREPARING LEADERSHIP TEAMS FOR AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF 1980--2000

A School District--University
Partnership Proposal for the
1976 U.C.E.A. Plenary Session.

John B. Peper, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools

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Atlantic City, New Jersey
The American Association of School Administrators

I consider this opportunity a rare privilege. First, it is not often that I am able to deliberate in writing about the profession I practice. It is refreshing to contemplate that profession as it might be in the immediate, intermediate and long-range future. Secondly, it is a rare opportunity indeed to share thoughts about professional development with representatives from the majority of institutions whose collective staffs educate most of the principals and central office administrators in the United States. Thirdly, I sense a climate developing where those of us who practice educational administration reach more frequently to join hands with those who teach educational administration in order to improve the practice of our profession.

These are good days to administer schools and school systems. The days ahead hold even brighter promise. This year in Milwaukee Public Schools we are given the daily opportunity to participate in major decisions affecting every resident. One in seven of the residents is a student in our schools. The parents of our students constitute another twenty percent of Milwaukee's residents. Our schools employ a work force of over 12,000 people. This makes us one of the three largest employers in the City of Milwaukee. Our annual budget is $250,000,000. This cash flow represents a greater economic impact than many of the major corporations in the United States.

We operate one hundred sixty-two separate school buildings. We have under construction or in construction planning over $40,000,000 in new buildings. No other firm in Milwaukee will have as much direct impact on the building and trades industries as we will have over the next few years.

Each day we feed 70,000 or more meals. No other food service chain in the city approaches this figure.

We face monumental problems. The courts have recently charged us with the responsibility to desegregate or to integrate the public schools. In the past thirty years we provided space for a school population which expanded at the rate of slightly over one thousand children per year. For the past four years, the school population has been declining at the rate of between three thousand and four thousand pupils per year. Achievement of pupils, while excellent for cities, is less than desirable. Too many of our young people fail to acquire sufficient achievement in basic education to make them first rate job applicants.

Our employees have become very sophisticated bargaining bodies. There are presently sixteen separate bargaining units. Contract negotiations and contract management require every administrator to become knowledgeable of laws, due process, jurisprudence and related human factors in a highly developed practical sense.

Every year the substantial knowledge base expands. All of our personnel require access to new developments in order to prepare the youngsters with meaningful current information.

How does this background relate to developing administrative teams for the period 1980-2000 A.D.? School executives are in a problem solving business. The large bulk of those administrators who will be leading the schools of Milwaukee are already employed by us. Sixty-two percent of our principals and supervisors are fifty years old or younger. Normally, promotion comes from within the system. Therefore, the leadership replacement is likely to come from our present teaching force. Moreover, we need to be able to accommodate and to anticipate change as it relates both to teaching and learning and to relationships among people. The probability of being able to bring about change through employment of personnel from outside the system is simply unrealistic. Even if such an event were possible, there is no guarantee that resultant changes would be desirable.

Our situation then is that we have many reasons to undertake change. We have some notions of what directions the change needs to take. We can identify those personnel who will be immediately responsible for change. We can predict with some degree of certainty who will be leading the Milwaukee Public Schools in the intermediate future of the next five to fifteen years, particularly at the building principal level. We have an opportunity to influence the selection, orientation and development of many of those building principals and supervisors for the period 15 to 25 years hence.

One school of thought might be to leave the future alone, especially the long-range future. That school of thought has a certain romantic, but impractical appeal. In a real sense, the immediate future--that is the next five years--is now. The intermediate future is also largely imbedded in the present, and even our future of the year 2000 may be more wrapped in the present than we are willing to admit. For example, it is unlikely that we will replace more than 25 of our existing 162 schools by 2000 A.D. Also, we are unlikely to build more than five schools in new locations during the same interval. A look at our present buildings and those on the drawing boards gives us a good insight about where education will be centered.

Our primary opportunity for bringing about change--short of some unpredictable holocaust--is to begin to work through our human resources. We need to build the kinds of relationships which permit development and which promote openness and exploration.

When I first talked about writing this paper with Jack Culbertson, I had in mind some definite solutions to propose here today. Since that time, however, I have become convinced that my solutions are less important than those solutions which we might collectively discover together. To stimulate an initial line of thought, I will offer the following hypothetical propositions.

Proposition One: The National Network

Let us assume that Milwaukee Public Schools would wish assistance in developing a lifelong plan for leadership education for current administrators and for prospective future administrators. We do by the way have such an interest. Assume also that we would like to work closely with our Wisconsin institutions of higher education. We would also like to open our avenues of exposure of the leadership staff to a broader set of institutions of higher education, perhaps even a national network of such institutions. Could this be done through universities and colleges of the University Council for Educational Administration?

Proposition Two: Degrees and Credentials

Let us assume that most people who pursue professional advancement through formal education have an interest in degrees and certificates. Yet, for Milwaukee Public Schools to promote a national perspective over a lifetime of administration we would wish to increase flexibility in decisions about what courses, which professors and in what location courses could be offered. Is it possible to organize a combined mix of flexible short courses, semester long courses, degree programs, and credential programs which would promote quality and maintain the present rights of individual degree granting institutions? For example, a student in Milwaukee Public Schools might enroll for a masters degree program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The student might desire an opportunity to spend one summer in New York City and to take a course at Columbia. Would it be possible to guarantee credit at Madison? Suppose that a New York student wanted to study at Madison for the summer. Could the Columbia student and the Madison student be exchanged with equal recognition by both institutions?

Minicredits. Imagine a second highly desirable option. Milwaukee Public Schools might wish to sponsor a sequence of short duration courses. Each course would be shorter in time than a full course at the University. But University personnel might well teach the course, might use graduate level materials and might be satisfied that the students had performed at a high quality. Is it possible to grant mini-credits, say one-half semester hour, one semester hour or as little as one-tenth semester hour, to the participants? Could some portion of a professional degree program be allotted to minicourses and opened to the student's personal choice?

A National Catalogue of Exchange Courses. In order to protect the quality of programs in educational administration and in order to promote exchanges between institutions, would it be possible to develop a national catalogue of courses which a network of institutions would jointly agree to accept as credit by more than one of the member institutions? At first the national catalogue might be limited to one course at each of 50 schools. The national catalogue might be no more than 50 courses.

Professors in Residence

In order to promote reflective thinking, which is fundamental to problem solving, we would like to explore the possibility of inviting one or more professors to spend extended periods of time with us developing procedures, materials and interaction opportunities. We would hope that they could teach us to confront our actions from a more academic perspective and perhaps improve the qualitative aspects of our judgements. These resident professors might operationalize the anthropological model of participant scholar. They might provide what I shall call "point of need" education. They could participate in a continuous dialogue about causal problems and they could hypothesize solutions. They could also provide knowledge resources at specific points of decision.

Our Substantive Blindside

Most of what I have discussed to this point has been procedural in nature. The administrator in me leans in that direction, but this inclination has certain problematic characteristics for us in Milwaukee, and I believe it may also be an issue elsewhere. Because administrators are good at developing organizations and at making them work effectively, our legitimate relationship to substantive issues comes under question more often than it should. On more than one occasion in the last three years, I have heard community members question the right to a place of principals in decisions relating to curriculum. Their criticisms centered about the notion that administrators are people who keep up with keys, issue expulsions, schedule children and enroll children, but administrators do not know about curriculum programming. Only experts in curriculum content hold legitimacy in the minds of such critics.

One could dismiss this criticism if it came only occasionally, but it comes often and from multiple sources. These critics vary among parents, custodians and teachers. Why does this criticism occur? I think we have a substantive blind-side that needs drastic attention in the profession. The substance of school and schooling needs to take a parallel importance with process in the education of the next generation of administrators, if we are to remain society's educational leaders. We have some insight into the major substantive needs facing educators in the next 20 years. We must extend the knowledge of computers to all students and teachers. The computer industry is barely twenty years old, but those citizens who lack a working background of computers in twenty years will be technically excluded from many areas of employment. Administrators must begin to acquire a substantive body of knowledge in this field.

A second substantive area of knowledge to pursue lies in the field of energy and its different sources. The average citizen of the future is likely to need to know about solar energy production, geothermal energy, nuclear energy alternatives and energy conversion.

To be excluded from these and other important substantive fields of knowledge is to be excluded from knowledgeable decision-making with reference to curriculum content or curriculum development in these fields. The profession, in my judgement, cannot afford to be excluded from participation in substantive issues. Part of our leadership development will need to be designed to encourage acquisition of large portions of new knowledge.

Building the Administrative Team

I see a need to build reinforcing teams of leaders. Principals can no more be effective in isolation than can the superintendent. Collectively, the combined and united efforts of decision-makers can bring about effective change. The following stratagems appear to be crucial in building the united leadership team.

One aspect of team building is through acquisition of new knowledge. The proposals above would greatly assist us in sponsorship of this process.

Another accompanying factor is the introduction of technology into the administrative team. One particular technology which needs broader use is computer imbedded. This includes refined scheduling, planning, forecasting, accounting, simulating of decisions and control techniques.

One third function which is crucial to building and maintaining the leadership team is to increase the quality and amount of social interaction between different levels of administrators. I would believe that this could be effectively accomplished through joint studies undertaken to improve the practice. We know that the next phase of our work is going to be devoted to enhancement of the principal as innovator and as substantive leader. We invite assistance.

One closing thought. These recommendations are made out of profound respect for the institutions and for the professors who were my mentors. They have prepared me well. The changes needed require our joint endeavors. It is only in a spirit of respect and love for the profession that I deliberate about its future.